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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Four hurt in train bombing

Four people were lightly wounded Sunday when a bomb exploded on train tracks in central Israel.

The explosion occurred around 7 a.m., shortly after a train, carrying some 500 passengers, left the Lod station traveling north from Beersheba to Haifa.

The blast shattered windows in the train.

Police said damage was minimal because the bomb was planted on tracks parallel to the ones used by the train.

Police are investigating why the device was not discovered during routine security sweeps of the tracks and whether the bomb was set off remotely.

Israel Radio reported that prior to the blast, a civilian had complained about a break in the fence enclosing the tracks.

Powell: U.S. shunning Arafat

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said the United States is in touch with Palestinian officials, but he declined to name them.

In televised interviews Sunday, Powell said the United States is shunning Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat because of Arafat's "failure of leadership."

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice echoed Powell's sentiment, telling Wolf Blitzer on CNN that there are "plenty of other Palestinian leaders to work with."

A real 'baby boomer'

Israelis are outraged by a picture of a Palestinian baby dressed as a suicide bomber.

The baby was photographed wearing a mock suicide bomber's uniform, complete with sticks of fake explosives and a red headband that read Hamas.

Israeli newspapers published the photograph, seized in a raid on a suspected terrorist's home in Hebron, on June 27.

The baby's family described the costume as a "joke."

But a Palestinian journalist said such costumes were common among Palestinians.

A Palestinian Authority official said Israel distributed the picture to "tell the world that the Palestinians are teaching their children how to hate Israel and how to act against Israel — and I just want to say this is correct," the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

The speech was nice, groups say; Now how do we implement vision?

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Most American Jewish leaders were heartened by President Bush's demand for extensive reforms in the Palestinian Authority, and are wondering how they can help translate that vision into reality.

Primarily, Jewish leaders said, they can hammer home Bush's message in a public relations campaign to the American public, and can lobby legislators to give substance to the president's vision through congressional resolutions.

In his June 24 speech on Mideast policy, Bush called for serious political and economic reform of the Palestinian Authority and strongly implied that Palestinians should oust Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Bush said he believes a provisional Palestinian state could be established within three years, but predicated it on the Palestinians implementing far-reaching reforms.

Having feared that Bush would endorse the speedy creation of a "provisional" Palestinian state, most Jewish groups were gratified by how strongly Bush backed Israel's position.

Once the impact of the speech sank in, however, analysts pointed out that it did not create a road map toward ending the conflict.

Bush's goals are important, analysts said, but the speech contained no detailed checklist of steps to accomplish them, nor initiatives to enact the required reforms.

American Jewish leaders still are unsure how to proceed, but hope they can help fill in some of the details by building support for Bush's platform and seeking congressional measures to capitalize on rising anti-Arafat sentiment.

Before the speech, stories had circulated of a split between, on one side, the White House and Pentagon — which wanted to condemn Arafat — and a more conciliatory State Department on the other.

With the State Department responsible for following through on Bush's vision, Jewish leaders want assurances that Secretary of State Colin Powell and his staff will adhere to the goals Bush enumerated.

"There is an interest in locking down the president's policy," one Democratic congressional staffer said.

Congressional and Jewish officials said Congress could take the lead by passing resolutions supporting various aspects of Bush's speech, in hopes of preventing the State Department from moving the bar to appease an apprehensive international community.

Calls are mounting for Powell to testify before Congress, so that his support for Bush's vision can be gauged.

Since Bush's speech was short on details, Jewish groups hope congressional initiatives can provide standards to judge Palestinian compliance with demands for accountable government, transparent finances and anti-terror action.

"We need to make sure there are some carrots and sticks out there," said Sarah Stern, national policy coordinator for the Zionist Organization of America. Among the ideas being floated are an oversight committee and a biannual report on the progress of Palestinian reforms.

Guidelines for American action in the Middle East are likely to be more pro-Israel if they come from Congress than from the White House or State Department.

But efforts are advancing slowly as legislators wait to see what the Bush administration and other players do next. "Right now, the administration has a window

MIDEAST FOCUS

No signs of Palestinians in rubble

Israeli soldiers found no Palestinian gunmen amid the rubble of the Palestinian headquarters in Hebron.

Soldiers searching the rubble of the compound, which the army blew up over the weekend, found no traces of some 15 Palestinian terror suspects who barricaded themselves there last week.

Military sources were quoted as saying the Palestinians may have escaped undetected, possibly via underground passages. A four-day army siege on the building ended last Friday, when the army began tearing down the structure.

Settlement outposts dismantled

Israeli settlers dismantled 11 illegal enclaves Sunday. The move followed an informal understanding between settler leaders and Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer.

Most of the unauthorized outposts consist only of a few mobile homes set on West Bank hilltops.

Palestinians found in ambulances

Israeli troops found 10 suspected Palestinian terrorists hiding in two ambulances in Ramallah. The Palestinians were apprehended when soldiers stopped the two vehicles for routine checks Sunday, Army Radio reported.

In the past, Israeli officials charged that Palestinians have violated international law by using ambulances to transport weapons and explosives and as cover for terror attacks and assaults on Israeli troops.

Israel to deny entry to Farrakhan

Israeli officials decided to bar Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. Farrakhan, who is currently touring the Middle East, had planned to propose that he mediate in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.



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to come up with an implementation plan," the Democratic congressional staffer said. "If they continue to fiddle around, Congress will step into the breach."

One American Jewish official said Bush's speech established a "new baseline" for how the government views the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The role of the American Jewish community, the official said, will be to push the new policy home to the American people through a continued public relations campaign.

Jewish leaders said that Israel continues to be besieged in the media, and that they need to continue efforts to combat what they consider anti-Israel rhetoric.

However, some American Jewish leaders warn that they should remain behind the scenes. They fear that high-profile action by American Jewish groups could be perceived as gloating or could lend credence to those who argue that the pro-Israel lobby in Washington dictated Bush's speech.

It's also unclear how much of a role American Jewish groups can play in selling Bush's plan to skeptical European and Arab leaders.

In a conference call with American Jewish leaders just after Bush's speech, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice asked Jewish leaders to use their contacts to help rally the international community behind Bush's plan.

"Many of us have contacts with foreign officials," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which hosted the conference call. "We should be calling and saying, 'This is an important opportunity.'"

But the heads of the organizations that most likely would lead such an effort said it won't be easy.

"Clearly, it's an uphill struggle," said David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee. "We will try to do the best we can."

Harris said he has been following the international media, and has seen some support for Bush's plan only in England and Germany. He believes other states will be unwilling to join calls for Arafat's ouster.

"The Europeans are not going to change their tune because the U.S. administration takes a new tack this week," he said.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said he believes European Jewish groups won't succeed in promoting Bush's plan.

"In the real world, the European Jewish communities are having a hard enough time selling support for Israel in general," he said. "They have not been able to influence decision-makers."

Foxman said it's the job of the Bush administration, not the Jewish communities, to sell the president's plan.

"We have to see ourselves in realistic terms," he said. "We are not as powerful as our enemies claim we are." □

It's a mazal tov in Shanghai

SHANGHAI (JTA) — This cosmopolitan Chinese city has witnessed what is believed to be its first Jewish marriage ceremony in more than 50 years.

Peter Cohen, originally from New York, met Anna Podtoptannaya, who hails from Ukraine, when he worked there as a Peace Corps volunteer.

Seeking adventure, the two later moved to China, ultimately settling in Shanghai, home to some 300 to 400 Jews.

Cohen works there as a management consultant and Podtoptannaya runs a brand management company.

Their wedding, which took place less than a month after the opening ceremony of Shanghai's Jewish community center, highlighted the international flavor of the Chinese city.

Guests arrived from the United States, Europe, Australia and Asia.

The ceremony itself turned out to have a wider-than-expected audience.

Many of the employees and guests at Shanghai's Cyprus Hotel — used to Chinese weddings, but unfamiliar with the Jewish ceremony — watched through the hotel's windows.

The last Jewish wedding in Shanghai took place in 1950, Cohen said. □

JEWISH WORLD

FBI head speaks to Muslim group

FBI Director Robert Mueller told a Muslim group that they should be outraged when members express support for terrorism.

Mueller later defended his decision to speak last Friday at the convention of the American Muslim Council, citing the importance of establishing a dialogue with the Muslim community.

The American Jewish Committee had asked Mueller not to address the group, saying its members have openly supported terrorist organizations that target Israel.

On June 27, one speaker told the convention that "Zionists are destroying America," according to the New York Sun.

Billy Graham blasts anti-Semitism

The Rev. Billy Graham spoke out against anti-Semitism. Graham spoke in Cincinnati last Friday before an estimated 37,000 people.

Referring to rising anti-Semitism in Europe, the evangelical leader said, "We need to do everything we can to be friends and neighbors of the people who have been chosen by God to be his people."

Earlier last week, Graham apologized to Jewish leaders in the city for anti-Semitic remarks he made in a taped conversation with President Nixon in 1972.

The leaders, including the heads of the local federation, the Jewish community relations council and the board of rabbis, said they accepted Graham's apology.

ZOA to put up 'wanted' posters

The Zionist Organization of America says it will put up "wanted" posters of Palestinians who killed Americans in Israel.

ZOA President Morton Klein said State Department officials have avoided offering rewards for the capture of people accused of killing Americans in Israel by naming the victims, not the suspects, in the reward information.

In other countries, those suspected of killing Americans have biographical information posted on wanted posters, Klein said. ZOA hopes to place its posters in Palestinian cities in the West Bank.

Pakistani player may face ban

A Pakistani tennis player may face a ban for teaming up with an Israeli. Aisam-Ul-Haq Qureshi and Israel's Amir Hadad advanced last Friday to the third round of the men's doubles competition at Wimbledon. But the combination angered the Pakistan Sports Board, whose director said the player could face sanctions, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The director said that while Qureshi is playing as a private individual, Pakistan has no ties with Israel.

Library group throws the book at destruction of Palestinian libraries

By Max Heuer

NEW YORK (JTA) — The largest association of libraries in the world has passed a resolution deploring the destruction of Palestinian libraries and cultural resources during Israel's invasion of the West Bank this spring.

The resolution by the council of the American Library Association, the organization's governing policy body, was toned down from an earlier version. That version, debated at the group's convention last month in Atlanta, directly blamed the Israeli government for the destruction.

But the resolution still is sparking criticism, with the Anti-Defamation League calling it "one-sided" and "troubling and wrong."

Yahel Vilan, consul for public affairs at the Israeli Consulate in New York, denied that the Israeli army was to blame for any damage to Palestinian libraries or cultural institution, stating that areas "used as a safe haven for terrorists and snipers" may "be caught in the cross fire."

The new resolution calls for an international investigation by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, a group that in previous years has used U.N. funding to rebuild libraries in war-stricken countries like Kosovo.

Thomas Twiss, a librarian at the University of Pittsburgh and a member of the ALA social response roundtable, submitted the original resolution, which deplored the destruction of "Palestinian cultural resources" by "Israeli forces" and called upon the "Israeli government to refrain from further actions of this type."

The final resolution states only that the ALA, which has 450,000 members, "deplores the destruction of library and cultural resources anywhere in the world, and therefore the destruction of these (Palestinian) library and cultural resources."

Michael Dowley, director of the association's international relations office, said the changes in the resolution reflect ALA policy that "if libraries are being destroyed, we don't want to see that happen."

The ALA was "not getting into the politics" of the situation in Middle East, he insisted. But Jewish groups weren't buying it.

"The bottom line is, it is still singling out Israel," Deborah Lauter, the ADL's Southeast director, said of the new resolution. "A few individuals who have their own political agenda present information to people who may not be informed and who let it happen. I wish they'd stop."

In an interview with JTA, Twiss cited a statement from Palestinian Culture Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo and articles from The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Christian Science Monitor and the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz.

These sources, Twiss said, document the destruction at the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Culture in Ramallah. The city has seen several intensive Israeli military operations over the past year.

He defended his resolution with media documentation of acts of defecation and graffiti in the Palestinian establishments, examples he claims demonstrates that the damages did not come in the heat of battle.

Vilan, however, said, "The Israeli Defense Forces do not indiscriminately destroy Palestinian cultural or academic institutions."

"We don't target libraries, we don't burn books," said Mark Regev, spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington. "This would seem, on face value, to be an anti-Israel resolution."

The resolution marks a decade-long trend of controversial Israel-based resolutions by the ALA, according to an ADL memo:

- In 1992, the ALA passed a resolution "condemning Israel for censorship and human rights violations," but rescinded it a year later because of a procedural error.
- In 1994, an ALA task force on Israeli censorship and Palestinian liberation was abolished, while the committee's chair, David Williams, was censured from holding any office in the roundtable for three years. A task force member at the time said Williams "has disregard and insensitivity to his collaborators regarding the issues of Jewish ethnic identity." □

Israeli officials are wary as international court debuts

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After championing the creation of an international criminal court for more than 50 years, Israel is concerned the court may become just another tool for bashing the Jewish state.

The International Criminal Court, which is headquartered in The Hague, comes into force Monday with the ability to indict individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity, war and aggression.

The court is expected to begin functioning in one year, after the selection of judges and a prosecutor who are to be chosen in secret ballot by states that ratified the international statute creating the court.

Israeli officials fear the court will be used to target Israelis — particularly settlers and soldiers — for prosecution.

The concern stems from what Israel says is a politically motivated text submitted by some Arab states during a conference that took place in Rome in 1998, when the statute creating the court was approved.

For this reason — although Israel signed the statute two years ago to show its support for the court's moral aims — the Jewish state has not ratified it.

Israel faces a "dilemma" over the "politicization of the court," the legal adviser of Israel's Foreign Ministry, Alan Baker, told JTA.

Israel has been "proud of the fact that it is among the founding fathers of the vision of an international criminal court," Baker said, noting that Israel took an active role in drafting the statute and participating in the various stages of the court's creation.

"The Islamic states ensure one way or another that their political war is pushed into everything good," he said. "They did this with the statute of the criminal court."

The idea of creating a permanent international criminal court emerged following World War II.

Efforts to establish the court were paralyzed during the Cold War and were only renewed in the early 1990s.

In the summer of 1998, the Rome conference finalized the text of the statute creating the court.

During the gathering, some Arab states introduced what Israel views as a poisonous provision.

As a result of the Arab move, the war crimes provision includes a reference to the transfer, directly or indirectly, of civilian populations from an occupier's territory into occupied territory.

"The intention was very clearly to bring in Israel's settlement policy and to turn it into a war crime," Baker said.

Because the text of the statute was voted on as a whole, rather than by section, Israel voted against the statute at the Rome conference.

More than two years later, the Israeli government approved the statute, as a show of support for the court's ideals.

Along with its signature, Israel made a formal declaration stating its rejection of any attempt to interpret the provisions of the statute in a politically motivated matter against Israel and its citizens.

Israel maintains the "transfer of population" provision is not

relevant to Israeli settlement activity. "Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention was drafted after the Second World War to prevent what the Nazis did in Europe, which was mass, forced transfer of population," Baker said. "This is not our policy. So we've argued that this provision should not be applied vis-a-vis Israel."

Israel also is concerned about possible attempts to bring up war crimes charges in relation to its campaign against Palestinian terrorism.

"We find ourselves confronted with all sorts of proposals and decisions by international organizations" that have been "initiated by the Arab states, singling out Israel and declaring that Israel is committing war crimes and violating international law in doing what we are doing to fight terrorism," Baker said.

"We can only assume the next step will be to utilize the criminal court to bring Israelis to trial."

Baker said Israel does not believe that its settlement activities or its war on Palestinian terrorism violate any international laws.

Just the same, he acknowledged that the potential for prosecution exists.

Even if a country did not sign the Rome statute, its citizens can be prosecuted under certain conditions.

The criminal court's jurisdiction will apply to citizens of nonparty states if the alleged crime is committed in a country that is party to the statute, if it involves a country that chooses to accept the court's jurisdiction on an ad-hoc basis, or if the U.N. Security Council refers a case to the court.

The court will not have retroactive authority, meaning it will only be able to deal with alleged crimes committed after the court enters into force.

Palestinians cannot lodge complaints with the court because there is no Palestinian state, but Arab countries can.

Baker said the Arab League has urged member-states to ratify the statute so they can elect judges inclined to prosecute Israelis.

Israel is not the only country wary about the court's potential politicization.

Of the 139 countries that signed onto the statute, only 69 have ratified it.

The United States also has strong reservations about the court, fearing that politically motivated cases will be brought seeking to prosecute Americans — including U.S. peacekeeping personnel — for their actions abroad.

While stopping short of criticizing President Clinton for signing the statute, President Bush has said the United States has "no legal obligations" to the court.

Baker noted that, among the Arab states, only Jordan has approved the statute.

Israel is taking a wait-and-see attitude before ratifying the statute.

"If we see that the court is not going to function as another U.N.-style, Israel-bashing body, then we might well come to the conclusion that we want to associate ourselves with the court," Baker said.

"We are being assured by countries like Canada and Norway, who are the prime movers, that they won't permit the court to be misused and abused, because that would be the end of the court," he said.

"We want to see the extent to which they succeed in implementing this. Hopefully, then we will be in a better position to decide." □